

Practice Standards for Social Workers:

Achieving Outcomes



Australian Association of Social Workers

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introduction

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has produced the standards in this document to guide practice and provide a means of accountability for its members. The standards reflect and encourage the profession's commitment to innovative practice and ongoing professional development and improvement. They have been developed after extensive consultation with members and consumer groups.

Aim of Practice Standards

The aim of the standards is to provide:

- a guide to practice;
- a measure of accountability for members;
- a basis for the standardisation of practice across Australia;
- a basis for quality guarantee, expectations and accountability for clients, employers and other professionals;
- a benchmark for the assessment of practice; and
- a guide for planning ongoing professional development.

Practice Standards for Main Areas of Social Work Practice

The practice standards in this document encompass the main areas of social work practice as follows:

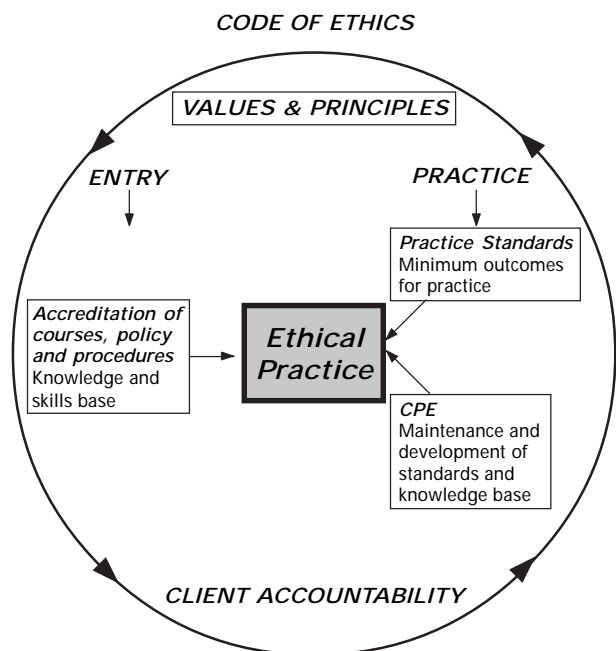
1. **Direct Practice**
2. **Service Management**
3. **Organisational Development and System Change**
4. **Policy**
5. **Research**
6. **Education and Professional Development.**

These areas of practice have been drawn from the knowledge and skills base for sound social work practice, described in the document *Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership of the AASW*, and from the *AASW Code of Ethics (1999)* and associated bylaws (August 2000).

Code of Ethics and the Practice Standards

The *AASW Code of Ethics (1999)* and associated by-laws (August 2000) provides the foundation for social work practice standards. The values, principles and ethical behaviour detailed in the Code of Ethics underpin all social work practice and, therefore, all of the practice standards in this document. This practice standards document and the Code of Ethics should therefore be used in conjunction with each other.

The diagram below shows how the Practice Standards relate to the Code of Ethics, the Policy and Procedures for Establishing Membership of the AASW and other parts of the framework of the profession. Table 1 on page 36 outlines this in more detail.



Complementary AASW documents and quality mechanisms

The standards complement three other key AASW documents and quality mechanisms within the profession. These are:

- Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership of the AASW (2000);
- Continuing Professional Education Policy (2000); and
- National Practice Standards of the Australian Association of Social Workers: Supervision (1993) [1993 was when these standards were adopted by the Board; they had operated as Victorian Standards since 1988].

format of the standards

The standards have been framed in terms of outcomes. In each area of social work practice there is:

- an objective stated as an outcome;
- a summary of the key aspects and concepts relating to that area of practice;
- outcome standards for each of the key aspects of practice; and

- indicators of minimum expected performance outcomes.

This emphasis on outcomes reflects not only the importance of social workers looking at and evaluating the impact of their practice, but also being able to demonstrate that social work involvement is effective.

application of the standards

The standards apply to all social work practice, irrespective of the context in which it is undertaken, for example the field of mental health, child protection, the justice system and in research, including social workers in private practice. While the specific contextual knowledge required by the social worker may differ in each field, the social work knowledge and skills base required does not change. A social worker may not be working in an identified social work position but the standards will still apply.

The areas of practice are not discrete and, at any one time, a social worker may need to call upon knowledge and skills in more than one of these areas in order to deal with a situation appropriately or to seek assistance with this. For example, in working with an individual client, a social worker

may see that agency policy affecting that client is inappropriate or perhaps even harmful to the client. There is then an obligation on the social worker to take steps with respect to that policy. In this instance, the standards with respect to Direct Practice and Policy would provide a guide to the social worker.

The standards provide the minimum expected practice level and expected outcomes. This means that, in the example given above, the social worker would not continue to work with the individual client without also taking some steps to address the harmful policy impact on the client. The Policy standards indicate what those steps should be in outcome terms.

knowledge and skills base of social work practice

The theory base for social work is constantly developing through research and knowledge building in social work and related disciplines. Given its importance with respect to practice standards, it is repeated in some detail here.

Knowledge for Practice

Firstly, knowledge from other disciplines is an integral component of social work education and continuing professional development. This material is usually covered in subjects such as sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, history, social theory, psychology and human development and behaviour. Particular areas of focus within these are:

- an understanding of society and how it has developed and is organised. This includes an understanding of the major insight provided by sociology, anthropology, social theory, history, economics and political science and an awareness of how these contribute to the understanding of the politico economic distribution of resources. An understanding of the history of Indigenous Australians is an essential component of this knowledge of society.
- knowledge of social welfare arrangements, their history and organisation and of the law in Australia. As the goal of social work is the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full potential of each individual, family, group and community in society, attention is given to the major groups who experience disadvantage and to those social structures and ideologies which give rise to, and maintain, disadvantage and oppression, particularly those concerning race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, class and sexual preference.
- knowledge of the individual, including human behaviour and development, personality development, life-cycle stages, family and social networks, physical health and ill-health, mental health and ill-health, disability, vulnerability and resilience. An understanding of the social construction of these concepts is another element.

Practice Knowledge and Skills

Essential to social work is the recognition that individual needs are influenced by socio-political and economic factors. This interactive dual focus of analysis (individual and systemic, private and public) distinguishes the theory and practice of social work from other helping professions. Social work knowledge and skills therefore necessarily include:

- multiple levels of analysis to encompass the macro, meso and micro causal impacts on human life;
- all methods of social work intervention – interpersonal practice, advocacy, group work, community work and social action to address both personal difficulties and public issues, as well as research, social policy analysis and development, administration, management and evaluation. There is an ever-growing body of social work theory in each of these areas;
- practice skills including interpersonal skills, communication skills, skills in reflective and critical thinking and analysis, data collection and management, and negotiation and mediation;
- skills in making assessments and deciding on the most appropriate intervention with which to respond to particular situations, judgements of this kind being a core social work skill;
- skills in recognising and thinking through ethical issues, again a fundamental component of social work practice, involving commitment to the Code of Ethics; and
- the contexts of social work practice at local, national and international levels. Understanding in this area requires knowledge of, and the ability to critically analyse, social, political, economic, historical, cultural and ecological systems. The processes, facilitators and constraints to change need to be understood, also the trends or evolutions of systems. Social workers also need to be able to critically analyse the structure of society, with particular attention to dimensions of power and disadvantage, and the influence of class, gender, age, intellectual and physical ability, heterosexism, race and ethnicity. There must be a focus on empowering and non-oppressive practice.

definitions and understandings

In this document, the following definitions and understandings apply:

Meaning given to “client”

The meaning given to the term “client” used in the practice standards in this document is the same as that in the *AASW Code of Ethics (1999)*, ie “individuals, groups, communities, organisations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or have exceptional needs”.

Supervision

The term “supervision” as used throughout this document is defined broadly as referring to the range of activities undertaken to meet professional development needs and accountability requirements.

Cultural Influences

The practice standards recognise the importance of cultural considerations and influences in client situations. In any client situation and in any of the main areas of social work practice, the social worker will be aware of cultural considerations and influences and respond appropriately.

The development of these practice standards has included a review of existing AASW standards and other national and international standards. While the standards aim to provide a comprehensive guide to social work practice, ongoing improvements and revisions will always be necessary as knowledge and environments are ever changing.

statement of objectives

Objective 1: Direct Practice

The outcome of direct social work practice is that:

- needs of clients are met;
- their potential is developed; and
- their control over their lives is fostered;

this being achieved through mutual engagement and the application of the social worker’s knowledge and skills.

Objective 2: Service Management

Client needs, organisational goals and community expectations of the service are met in the most appropriate manner, as far as possible, using social work knowledge, skills and resources.

Objective 3: Organisational Development and System Change

The social worker’s knowledge of organisational systems and processes and societal systems is applied in such a way that inequalities are identified and appropriate action is taken, with the result that social barriers, inequality and injustice are reduced.

Objective 4: Policy

The well-being of clients, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or who have exceptional needs, is improved through the social worker’s:

- promotion and implementation of policies and practices which would achieve a fair, equitable and effective allocation of social resources; and
- identification of inappropriate or inequitable policy goals and outcomes.

Objective 5: Research

Client needs, organisational goals and social policy are addressed through the application of the social worker’s values, knowledge and skills in the research process.

Objective 6: Education and Professional Development

The social worker recognises the importance of continually increasing their knowledge and skills and is committed to, and actively engages in, a process of continuing education.

1. *Direct Practice*

Objective

The outcome of direct social work practice is that:

- needs of clients are met;
- their potential is developed; and
- their control over their lives is fostered;

this being achieved through mutual engagement and the application of the social worker's knowledge and skills.

Summary

The direct practice standard concerns every aspect of direct social work. It draws on all of the core areas of social work knowledge and skills but focuses on:

- methods of intervention;
- interpersonal and communication skills, reflective thinking, critical thinking and analysis, data collection and management, and negotiation and mediation; and
- making assessments and deciding on the most appropriate social work intervention with which to respond to a particular situation.

It is essential that the client is as fully involved as possible in decisions about the social work service being offered or provided and in regular review of that service. Confidentiality requirements, legal matters, report writing and record keeping must be managed appropriately.

Key concerns in direct practice are the provision of information to the client regarding client rights (such as the right of appeal or to query a service); the cessation of a service to a client; the transfer or referral of a client to another social worker or service; and responsibilities to meet legal requirements (for example in the case of an involuntary client who may have to abide by court orders).

Key aspects and concepts

- knowledge, skills and resources of the social worker
- explanation of social work service
- client involvement
- appropriateness of social work assessment, intervention and outcomes
- service development
- recording and record keeping
- report writing
- multi disciplinary work environments
- supervision
- referral /termination/interruption of service
- advice of right to query service
- evaluation of social work service

Standards

Knowledge, skills and resources of the social worker

Standard 1.1 The social worker has the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to bring to the client situation.

Indicators

- The social worker, as a member of an agency or as a private practitioner, makes an appropriate assessment of the client's situation.
- The social worker makes an assessment that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to work with the client situation.
- Where the social worker does not have the necessary knowledge, skills or resources to offer an appropriate and satisfactory service to the client, the client is advised and referred to another worker or agency.
- The social worker undertakes relevant training and professional development activities, including consultation, to develop knowledge and skills as necessary.

Explanation of social work service

Standard 1.2 The client is made aware of the nature and extent of the social work service being offered and this information is recorded.

Indicators

- The social worker explains the service to the client and describes any limitations with what is being offered.
- The client is aware of the service available to them as far as possible.
- The contact record contains specific details of the service offered and clearly specifies any limitations with respect to the service or understanding by the client.

Client involvement

Standard 1.3 The client is involved, as far as possible, in developing a service plan with the social worker and in its implementation, the strengths and capacities of the client being acknowledged and respected.

Indicators

- Opportunities are provided for the client to be involved in information sharing and decision making throughout the service delivery process.
- The client is assisted to determine what service/s they wish to accept within the limits of their capability.
- Involuntary clients are given the opportunity to participate in decision making as far as possible in their particular circumstances.
- In those aspects of service planning where the involuntary client has no choice about the plan, the social worker assists the client, as far as possible, to understand the plan of action.
- A service delivery plan is prepared with the client wherever possible.
- The plan outlines service/s being offered, objectives and planned outcomes, how these are to be achieved and the reasons for their inclusion in the plan.
- The plan includes provision for regular review of progress, noting the outcomes of each review and inclusion of any decisions to amend, remove or add new aims or outcomes and ways in which these are to be achieved.

Standard 1.4 **The social work assessment and the intervention taken is appropriate to the client's situation, in keeping with ethical and legislative requirements and directed towards appropriate outcomes reached in agreement with the client wherever possible.**

Indicators

- Relevant information is gathered regarding the client situation.
- The client situation is assessed including identification of relevant:
 - physical factors such as health and well-being, addiction;
 - social factors including family, significant relationships, social contacts and supports, experience of discrimination and oppression and community involvement;
 - psychological factors, including developmental and life span factors, significant life events, grief and loss, exposure to violence, abuse or neglect;
 - environmental factors, including education, employment, finances, accommodation and other services with which the client is in contact;
 - legal, education, health, employment and social security systems which impact on or with which the client is involved; and
 - personal and other resources that might be drawn on in the situation.
- The nature and level of risk for the client, the social worker and others is assessed, and appropriate intervention is taken in relation to the level of risk.
- The client's understanding of the situation and their strengths to deal with it are assessed.
- The social worker acknowledges and respects the strengths and capacities of the client in the mutual development of the assessment and plan.
- Appropriate social work knowledge and theory is identified as a basis for offering a social work service.
- Likely or possible outcomes of the service/s offered are identified, discussed with the client and agreed to as far as possible.
- Legislative and organisational requirements and considerations are identified and explained to the client.
- As appropriate, relevant others are involved in, or advised of, the proposed plan.

Service development

Standard 1.5 **The social worker is aware of the relationship between the client and their social environment and takes appropriate action.**

Indicators

- The social worker takes appropriate steps to address organisational and system change to the extent that is practical and possible.
- The social worker identifies policy issues and contributes to policy development and change to the extent that is practical and possible.
- The social worker contributes knowledge and skills to the planning and development of appropriate services to the extent that is practical and possible.

Recording and record keeping

Standard 1.6 **Records are kept and maintained in accordance with ethical principles and the relevant legislation regarding record keeping, privacy and freedom of information provisions relevant to the jurisdiction in which the social work service is being offered.**

Indicators

- A relevant record keeping system is in place.
- Records are kept in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics.
- Records are kept in accordance with relevant legislation and agency policy. In the absence of legislation, records should be kept and stored securely for seven years.
- The client is aware of who might see or use his or her records.
- Requests for access by the client to his or her records are dealt with promptly and appropriately.
- The client has free access to their record and given the opportunity to comment. Where this is not possible or feasible, or where part of a record is not shown to the client, the reason is explained, including the extent to which the limitation applies.

Report writing

Standard 1.7 **Reports accurately and objectively reflect client circumstances, in keeping with ethical principles and legislative provisions.**

Indicators

- Reports contain only information essential to the matters relevant to the purpose of the report.
- Reports have not omitted relevant and pertinent information.
- Information is presented in an objective manner, with assessments, recommendations and decisions supported by relevant information.
- Legislative implications and/or requirements are clearly identified and stated, together with any associated client information and/or action to be taken.
- The client is shown the report and given the opportunity to comment. Where this is not possible or feasible, or where part of a report is not shown to the client, the reason is explained, including the extent to which the limitation applies. Limitations may be due to legislative or agency policy.

Multi disciplinary work environments

Standard 1.8 **Within the multi disciplinary team, the social worker maintains social work principles, values and practice whilst acknowledging the practice base of other disciplines.**

Indicators

- The social worker can articulate the domain of social work practice.
- The social worker contributes discipline specific social work values, principles and practice to team activities.
- The social worker negotiates respectfully with colleagues from other disciplines.

Supervision

Standard 1.9 **The social worker recognises the need for supervision and, when necessary, obtains advice.**

Indicators

- Supervision, consultation and advice are sought from an appropriate person when necessary in relation to specific client situations.
- There is regular participation in supervisory processes within or outside the employing agency or organisation or, in the case of a private or lone practitioner, from an appropriate source.
- Supervision is utilised as part of professional development to enhance knowledge and skills in direct practice.
- Social workers providing supervision to other social workers in relation to direct practice are appropriately experienced and qualified and are given supervision training.

Referral /termination/interruption of service

Standard 1.10 **When necessary, the social worker recognises the need for, and arranges a referral to, a relevant service provider and/or for termination of the social work service; and, where service is interrupted for some reason, puts in place appropriate interim service or other arrangements.**

Indicators

- The social worker encourages the client to play a central role in the referral process.
- The social worker provides information for the client to allow maximum choice in the decision making regarding referral.
- The social worker recognises when the service no longer serves the interests or needs of the client.
- When the service appears not to serve the interests of the client, this is raised with the client and the professional relationship or service is re-negotiated or terminated.
- Where necessary, other relevant options to meet client needs are identified and/or provided and the client is assisted in considering and/or transferring to one or more of these.
- Where a social work service is interrupted for some reason, this is discussed with the client and an appropriate interim service or other arrangements put in place.
- Where necessary the social worker brings to the attention of the manager the need for appropriate service to be put in place.

Advice of right to query service

Standard 1.11 **The social worker advises the client of their right to query the service provided and the avenues and procedures to follow if the client wishes to do so.**

Indicators

- The client is advised of the right to query the level or appropriateness of the social work service provided and the procedures for doing this are explained.
- If any concerns are raised by the client during provision of the social work service, the client is reminded of this right and how the client might proceed.
- When appropriate information regarding the social work service and client rights in relation to the service are provided to the client in a written form at the initial contact between client and social worker.

Standard 1.12 **The social worker seeks feedback from the client in the evaluation of service provision and uses this to improve future practice.**

Indicators

- Progress and service provision is regularly reviewed with the client.
- Feedback is sought and obtained from the client at the conclusion of the provision of service.
- Regular reviews of progress, as well as a final review, are included in the service plan developed in consultation with the client.
- A questionnaire or survey is used to obtain feedback from the client at the conclusion of the provision of service when appropriate.
- Feedback from the client is reviewed and practice changed when appropriate.

2. Service Management

Objective

Client needs, organisational goals and community expectations of the service are met in the most appropriate manner, as far as possible, using social work knowledge, skills and resources.

Summary

All social workers, regardless of their organisational position or the context of their practice, have a responsibility to manage their own service provision and practice in a way which is consistent with these standards. This may involve management of staff and other agency resources.

The term “social work manager” therefore applies to all social workers.

Key aspects and concepts

- social work values as the focus of social work service
- agency framework consistent with the Code of Ethics
- non-discriminatory policies, practices and resource allocation
- adequacy of staff resources and working conditions
- teamwork and communication
- efficient and accountable social work service
- staff supervision
- training and professional education and development
- debriefing in difficult situations
- accountable use of resources
- commitment to quality and continuous improvement
- agency policies and procedures

Standards

Social work values as the focus of social work service

Standard 2.1 **The social work manager encourages the agency to develop policies consistent with the five basic values of social work practice: human dignity and worth, social justice, service to humanity, integrity, and competence.**

Indicators

- The five social work values are clearly articulated in all service mission statements and business plans.
- Policies and procedures are developed and implemented that reflect social work values and principles.
- The agency head and senior managers have knowledge of the values and principles of social work.

Agency framework consistent with the Code of Ethics

Standard 2.2 **The social work manager acquaints agency management with the Code of Ethics and its implications for social work practice. The agency head is encouraged to recognise the principles and objectives of the Code and to eliminate workplace factors that prohibit or constrict adherence to its terms.**

Indicators

- The agency head is aware of the Code of Ethics, its principles, objectives and implications for each service unit.
- Processes are in place to eliminate or reduce workplace factors prohibiting or constricting adherence to the Code of Ethics.

Non-discriminatory policies, practices and resource allocation

Standard 2.3 **The social work manager encourages non-discriminatory policies and practices and advocates for resources to meet client rights and needs.**

Indicators

- Organisation policies are reviewed regularly and discriminatory policies and practices identified.
- Non-discriminatory policies and practices are developed and implemented.
- Client-focused practices are encouraged that ensure:
 - clients participate in decision-making processes; and
 - clients have access to information.
- Processes are in place that aim to address client needs and/or preferences.

Adequacy of staff resources and working conditions

Standard 2.4 **The social work manager seeks to obtain and maintain adequate staff levels and acceptable working conditions.**

Indicators

- Processes are in place to regularly review staffing level requirements.
- Consistent efforts are made to establish and maintain required staffing levels.
- Processes are implemented to ensure that acceptable working conditions, including occupational health and safety requirements, are in place.

Teamwork and communication

Standard 2.5 **The social work manager promotes effective teamwork and communication.**

Indicators

- Effective and accountable communication systems are identified that are relevant to the organisation's internal and external business.
- Effective communication systems are implemented and regularly reviewed.
- The value of teamwork is promoted within the social work service and across the organisation.
- Strategies for effective teamwork are identified and implemented.

Efficient and accountable social work service

Standard 2.6 **The social work manager takes responsibility for delivering an efficient and accountable service.**

Indicators

- Efficient and effective service systems are identified.
- The social work manager advocates ensuring that efficient and effective service systems are implemented.
- Processes for accountability to the organisation and the profession are identified and implemented.
- There is appropriate and efficient use of work time.

Staff supervision

Standard 2.7 **The social work manager arranges for appropriate supervision of staff.**

Indicators

- Processes are in place to ensure that all professional supervision needs are identified in consultation with staff.
- A supervision plan is developed for each worker and implemented with input from the worker and the supervisor.
- Processes are in place for meeting professional supervision needs.
- Staff receive appropriate and regular supervision.

Training and professional education and development

Standard 2.8 **The social work manager ensures that all staff receive ongoing training and professional education and advocates for adequate resources to meet staff development needs.**

Indicators

- Processes are established to ensure that staff professional education and training needs are identified on an annual basis.
- Resources are identified that meet education and training needs.
- Staff education and training needs are addressed.
- Staff are encouraged to pursue post-graduate training opportunities where possible.

Debriefing in difficult situations

Standard 2.9 **The social work manager provides or arranges debriefing and crisis and/or ongoing support for staff when they experience difficult or traumatic circumstances during the course of their work.**

Indicators

- Staff support needs are identified.
- Staff debriefing needs are identified.
- Debriefing is provided in a timely manner according to the circumstances.
- Staff support needs are routinely addressed within the organisation.

Accountable use of resources

Standard 2.10 **The social work manager uses finances and other agency resources for the purposes for which they are granted and accounts accurately for their expenditure.**

Indicators

- Service budget systems are clearly articulated and specific items of expenditure identified.
- Budget and other resource requirements and processes are clearly identified, accounted for and open to scrutiny.
- Budget and other resource expenditure is clearly identified.
- Processes are established to ensure changing budget and other resource requirements are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Commitment to quality and continuous improvement

Standard 2.11 **The social work manager ensures a commitment to continuous quality assurance and improvement and practice research.**

Indicators

- Strategies required for quality assurance and continuous improvement are identified.
- Issues requiring quality improvement are identified.
- Quality assurance and improvement activities are documented.
- Strategies needed to undertake practice research are identified.
- Resources required for practice research are identified and allocated.
- Practice research is undertaken as an integral part of ongoing practice.
- Outcomes of practice research and quality improvement are implemented.

Agency policies and procedures

Standard 2.12 **The social work manager ensures that policies and procedures are documented and are accessible.**

Indicators

- Policies and procedures are documented.
- Policies and procedures are available to all staff, clients and other relevant parties.
- Policies and procedures are reviewed and updated as needed.
- Policies and procedures conform to relevant legislation.

3. *Organisational Development and System Change*

Objective

The social worker's knowledge of organisational systems and processes and societal systems is applied in such a way that inequalities are identified and appropriate action is taken, with the result that social barriers, inequality and injustice are reduced.

Summary

This standard encompasses organisational systems and processes in:

- the organisation in which the social worker works;
- other organisations with which the social worker and clients come into contact; and
- wider societal systems such as health, legal, welfare, education, recreation and religious systems.

It is expected that the social worker will have knowledge and understanding of organisational systems and processes, be able to identify those in their work context and to analyse their effect, both positive and negative, with respect to clients.

The social worker may identify the need for change and must then be able to take appropriate and reasonable steps towards this, demonstrating knowledge of change management processes and appropriate organisational development approaches. The ability to involve and empower clients appropriately and ethically in organisational change and development is an important consideration.

Where organisations and systems other than those in which the social workers works are involved, the social worker will identify appropriate people and mechanisms through which to channel concerns or initiate change.

It is recognised that the organisations and systems with which a social worker works are complex and dynamic, requiring the social worker to draw on a range of knowledge and skills with some depth of capacity if they are to practise effectively. It is not expected that the social worker will do this alone but that they do have the ability to work with others to initiate change and achieve improved outcomes for the client.

The standard does not encompass policy aspects of organisational systems and processes as these are included in the policy standard.

Key aspects and concepts

- knowledge and understanding of organisational systems and processes, including decision making processes, and of wider societal systems
- analysis of the responsiveness of organisational systems and processes in meeting client needs and the effect of these on clients
- facilitation of the interface between the client and the organisational systems and processes
- knowledge and understanding of organisational change and development
- identification of the need and options for change and/or development
- initiation of appropriate action for change and/or development
- appropriate involvement of the client in the organisational change and/or development
- review of relevant organisational systems and processes within the organisation in which the social worker works or with which the social worker and their clients come into contact
- use of internal organisational review, complaint and appeal processes and administrative decision review processes, as well as Freedom of Information (FOI), confidentiality and privacy provisions where they apply
- identification of the need for change in wider societal systems and raising of this appropriately for consideration and possible action by the AASW or other relevant bodies.

Standards

Knowledge and understanding of organisational systems and processes, including decision making processes, and of wider societal systems.

Standard 3.1 The social worker demonstrates knowledge and understanding of organisational systems and processes and of wider societal systems.

Indicators

- The social worker is able to outline key systems and processes in the organisation in which they work, which affect, or have the potential to affect, the well-being of clients; and in wider societal systems, especially those related to the organisation or functions of the organisation in which they work, and how these impact on clients in terms of access to services, social justice and distribution of resources to meet needs.
- The social worker is able to give examples of several broad societal systems and outline their role and general systems and processes, within the context of social work values, principles and practice.

Responsiveness of organisational systems and processes

Standard 3.2 The social worker has made an analysis of organisational systems and processes and the extent to which these are responsive to the needs of the client.

Indicators

- Key organisational systems and procedures including eligibility criteria; application processes; referral procedures; guidelines; decision making, review and appeal processes; interview and other administrative proformas; other relevant formal and informal practices and procedures, including attitudes and values which underpin these, and related organisational structures are identified.
- The social worker has made an analysis of these and is able to explain how they impact on clients, identifying those which are responsive to client needs and how as well those which are not and why this is so.

Interface between the client and organisational systems and processes

Standard 3.3 The social worker works with the client and the organisation(s) so that the client receives the most appropriate and effective service from the organisation.

Indicators

- The social worker works with the clients and management and other staff in the organisation(s) so that relevant, easily accessible information regarding the organisations(s) and its (their) functions and procedures is available to clients
- Appropriate channels for communication between clients and organisation(s) are identified and facilitated.
- The social worker facilitates consideration for any difficulties so that improvements can be made by the organisation(s) and/or explanation of limitations of the service can be given to the client.
- The social worker promotes and contributes to the development and use of routine, ongoing client feedback processes of the organisation(s).

Knowledge of organisational change and development

Standard 3.4 The social worker demonstrates knowledge and understanding of organisational change and development processes.

Indicators

- Key elements of organisational change are identified.
- A number of organisational development processes are identified.
- The social worker is able to give examples of organisational change and development processes of which they are aware or in which they have been involved.

Identification of the need and options for change and /or development

Standard 3.5 The social worker is able to identify when change is needed and ways in which appropriate change might be achieved as well as actively contribute to the change process.

Indicators

- The social worker demonstrates the capacity to identify, consult and negotiate change where issues of access to services, equitable, fair and just processes and social justice arise.
- Information from the social worker's analysis of organisational responsiveness to client needs is reviewed and areas for change are identified.
- Other sources of relevant information are identified.
- Management analysis of client feedback information is encouraged and the social worker actively seeks to have this information reviewed and acted upon.
- Where necessary and appropriate, the need for further information gathering or research is identified, negotiated with management and arrangements for this to be undertaken are made
- Options for organisational change and development, including training and development, changes in guidelines and procedures and ways to achieve cultural change, are put forward and the social worker actively contributes to, and participates in, the change processes.

Client involvement in organisational change and development

Standard 3.6 The social worker identifies when and how to involve clients in matters relating to organisational change and development.

Indicators

- Appropriate ways of involving clients in organisational review, change and development processes are identified.
- The social worker demonstrates the capacity to develop or contribute to these and to their implementation.
- The client is involved appropriately.
- Ethical considerations are identified and managed appropriately.
- Clients are provided with feedback on the outcomes.

Review of organisational systems and processes

Standard 3.8 **The social worker is able to initiate and/or contribute to the review of organizational systems and processes in the organisation in which they work or with which the social worker and their clients come into contact.**

Indicators

- The social worker promotes regular review of organisational systems and procedures.
- The social worker contributes to the development of the review process, promoting client involvement, participates in the review process and contributes to the analysis of findings and development of plans for change.

Internal and external review and appeal processes

Standard 3.9 **The social worker is aware of, and assists clients to make appropriate use of, internal organisational review, complaint and appeal processes, as well as external administrative and other appeal processes when relevant.**

Indicators

- Appropriate decision making, review, complaint and review processes are promoted within the organisation.
- The social worker ensures that clients are provided with information regarding organisational decision making, review and appeal and complaint processes, as well as FOI, confidentiality and, where they apply, privacy provisions;
- The social worker is aware of external administrative law and other appeal and review processes, provides the client with relevant information regarding these and assists the client to access them.

Wider societal systems

Standard 3.10 **The social worker identifies the need for change in wider societal systems and raises this appropriately for consideration and possible action.**

Indicator

- The need for change is raised with other social workers in those systems and for consideration by the AASW and other relevant bodies.

4. Policy

Objective

The well-being of clients, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or who have exceptional needs, is improved through the social worker's:

- promotion and implementation of policies and practices which would achieve a fair, equitable and effective allocation of social resources; and
- identification of inappropriate or inequitable policy goals and outcomes.

Summary

This standard applies in all social work practice contexts.

The social worker should identify the policy which underpins the context in which they work and, if this is not consistent with social work values and principles and client needs and does not address evident social justice principles and issues, or does so inappropriately or inadequately, take steps to bring this about as far as possible. The effects of the implementation of policy should also be reviewed regularly and steps taken to achieve appropriate changes when necessary.

The standard incorporates the following:

- policy underpinning social work services in agencies; private practice; and social work education and research bodies;
- broader internal organisational policy;
- policy which underpins government and non government agency programs and services; and
- policy in the public domain relating to social needs, social justice and human rights issues.

The standard refers to policy relevant to the social worker's practice context. It also expects that the social worker will have a wider capacity to identify and take appropriate action in relation to aspects of policy in other contexts and in the broader community which are not consistent with social work values and principles, client needs and social justice principles.

Key aspects and concepts

- consistency with social work values and ethical base
- identification of existing policy
- identification of inappropriate policy
- articulation of policy reflecting client needs and social justice principles and issues
- policy draws from social work practice knowledge and experience
- initiation of action to change and/or develop policy
- acceptance and implementation of appropriate policy
- review of policy and outcomes of its application
- public awareness of client needs and social justice and human rights issues
- ethical considerations
- client involvement

Standards

Identification of existing policy

Standard 4.1 As part of their practice, the social worker identifies the policy context in which they work and determines whether it is consistent with social work values and principles.

Indicators

- The social worker is able to identify the main policy issues and provisions relevant to their practice context.
- The social worker is able to identify when the main policy provisions relevant to their work context impact on clients in a way which is inconsistent with social work values and principles and the reason(s) for this.

Identification of inappropriate policy

Standard 4.2 The social worker identifies aspects of policy, relating to their practice context, which are inappropriate, inconsistent or inadequate and is able to explain why this is so.

Indicator

- Policy which is inappropriate, inconsistent or inadequate is identified and appropriate reasons for this given.

Articulation of appropriate policy

Standard 4.3 In their practice context, the social worker is able to articulate policy appropriate to that context which reflects social work values and principles, client needs and social justice principles and issues.

Indicators

- Appropriate policy issues are identified.
- The social worker is able to explain the rationale behind the policy and its appropriateness.
- Where policy issues are under consideration/need to be addressed, the social worker is able to identify appropriate options.
- The social worker is able to explain the options and the rationale, benefits and possible outcomes of these.

Use of practice knowledge and experience

Standard 4.4 The social worker draws from practice knowledge and experience in identifying appropriate policy for their practice context.

Indicators

- The social worker has identified policy issues arising from their practice knowledge and experience.
- These have been considered in relation to existing policy and issues remaining to be addressed have been identified.

Action for policy development, implementation and change

Standard 4.5 **Appropriate action is initiated by the social worker for the development, implementation and/or change of policy in their practice context.**

Indicator

The social worker has:

- raised the issues within their practice context for further consideration;
- researched or encouraged further research of the issues if needed;
- proposed an approach or approaches which might be taken to address the issues, including further research of the issues, consultation with relevant others and the development of appropriate policy options; and
- maintained an appropriate active involvement to promote the implementation of appropriate policy.

Evidence that appropriate steps taken

Standard 4.6 **The social worker has taken relevant and reasonable steps to have appropriate policy developed, accepted and implemented.**

Indicator

- There is evidence that the social worker has taken appropriate, reasonable steps to address policy issues.

Policy review and evaluation

Standard 4.7 **Provision is made for the review and evaluation of policy and its outcomes and this is undertaken in a timely manner.**

Indicators

- The need to review and evaluate policy and its outcomes is recognised by the social worker.
- The social worker seeks to establish and/or advocates for appropriate mechanisms and plans to be put in place in their practice context.
- Review processes, documents and consideration of the outcomes are evident.

Public awareness

Standard 4.8 **The social worker contributes to increasing public awareness of client needs and social justice issues generally and in specific circumstances when they arise.**

Indicators

- The social worker contributes to public awareness - raising initiatives within their practice context.
- The social worker identifies needs and issues for consideration and possible action by the AASW and other relevant bodies.
- When the opportunity arises, the social worker responds to requests for information and comment on policy issues.

Ethical considerations

Standard 4.9 **The social worker is able to identify circumstances in which policy requirements or directions in their practice context raise social work ethical issues and is able to deal with this appropriately.**

Indicators

- The social worker recognises an ethical issue when it arises.
- The social worker raises the matter within the organisation and proposes solutions.
- If the issue remains, the social worker consults with social work colleagues to seek other possible solutions or seeks the advice and assistance of the AASW.
- If the issue is sufficiently serious and remains unresolved, the social worker determines whether remaining in the situation would place them in an unacceptable position with respect to the Code of Ethics and takes appropriate action.

Client involvement

Standard 4.10 **The social worker uses and encourages approaches to policy development, review and change which maximise client involvement and contribution.**

Indicators

- The social worker is able to identify appropriate ways in which this could be done.
- The social worker has taken reasonable steps to encourage this to be done when necessary or appropriate in their practice context.
- Where undertaken by the social worker, client involvement has been managed appropriately.

5. Research

Objective

Client needs, organisational goals, and social policy, are addressed through the application of the social worker's values, knowledge and skills in the research process.

Summary

Research is broadly defined as the systematic search for knowledge to inform social work practice. It comprises a range of activities including the searching through literature bases for knowledge to inform practice, the evaluation of research studies, the evaluation of social policy, the planning and implementation of research projects, and the critical evaluation of the social worker's own practice.

Key aspects and concepts

- research methods, including quantitative and qualitative approaches
- codes of ethics for research, including the role and operations of Research Ethics Committees
- critical analysis of practice
- research literature
- dissemination of research findings

Standards

Social work values as the focus of social work research

Standard 5.1 **The social worker conducts all aspects of research consistent with the five basic values of social work practice: human dignity and worth, social justice, service to humanity, integrity, and competence.**

Indicators

- Research questions chosen are based on the five basic values of practice. Research is directed at the resolution of social work problems in practice and policy.
- The relationship between the social work researcher, research colleagues, and the subjects of research is based on the five basic values of practice.

Social work research consistent with the Code of Ethics and other formal ethical guidelines.

Standard 5.2 **The social worker conducts all aspects of research within the constraints of the AASW Code of Ethics and the legal framework for the management of ethical issues in research such as the operations of the NH&MRC.**

Indicator

- Research activity is consistent with the NHMRC *National statement on ethical conduct in research involving humans 1999* which provides the framework for the conduct of research with human subjects.

Competence

Standard 5.3 **Research activities are based on a solid understanding of research principles and research methods.**

Indicators

- Social work researchers demonstrate a range of skills in searching out knowledge for practice. These include skills in searching data bases and other library resources.
- Social work researchers demonstrate a knowledge of a range of specific research methods, their limitations and application.

Evidence based practice

Standard 5.4 **The social worker's practice is informed by the evidence based research in the area of practice.**

Indicators

- Connections between social work practice and the knowledge base for practice are clearly articulated.
- The social worker regularly updates knowledge and skills for practice through a range of professional development activities such as systematic reading of the research literature and the attendance of conferences, seminars and workshops.

Dissemination of research findings

Standard 5.5 **The social worker shares the outcomes of research with colleagues so that the research product is available to other practitioners.**

Indicator

- The social worker submits research findings to the scrutiny of peers through a range of activities such as writing research reports for publication in professional journals and presentation of research at appropriate professional forums.

6. *Education and Professional Development*

Objective

The social worker recognises the importance of continually increasing their knowledge and skills and is committed to a process of continuing education.

Summary

Education in social work encompasses the formal training received in Schools of Social Work at both the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, the range of professional development activities undertaken throughout the working life of a social worker and the learning, which takes place through supervision. This standard builds on the Principles Underlying Social Work Education described in the document Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership of AASW (2000). It seeks to extend those principles throughout the working life of a social worker. It also reflects the principles set out in some detail in the AASW's Policy on Continuing Professional Education contained in the Policy Planner Logbook (2000).

Key aspects and concepts

- commitment to the ongoing development of skills and knowledge
- importance of supervision
- reflection on practice
- development of ethical practice
- relationship between research and learning
- the development of skills and knowledge related to the demands of a changing society

Standards

Commitment to ongoing development of skills and knowledge

Standard 6.1 **The social worker is engaged in a process of continuing professional education which assists the development of their skills and knowledge in their chosen field of practice and their understanding of the issues facing the wider community**

Indicators

- The social worker keeps abreast of developments in their own field of practice and, where possible, across social work generally.
- The social worker identifies training required for particular aspects of practice and ensures that appropriate training is undertaken.
- The social worker is able to relate their developing skills and knowledge to the organisational context in which they work.
- The social worker is able to relate their developing skills and knowledge to the social, economic and political context in which they work.
- The social worker's practice is informed by their developing understanding of wider social issues.
- Where a social worker develops particular expertise, they offer training and/or supervision to other practitioners requiring further development in that area.

Importance of Supervision

Standard 6.2 **The social worker includes supervision as an important part of their continuing professional education.**

Indicators

- The social worker participates in and contributes to regular supervision.
- The social worker uses supervision to develop their skills and knowledge.
- The social worker uses supervision to help identify their professional education requirements.
- The social worker uses supervision to develop a greater understanding of the organisational, social, economic and political contexts in which they work.
- The social worker uses supervision to reflect on interventions made in their practice to assess their appropriateness and effectiveness.

Reflection on Practice

Standard 6.3 **The social worker uses ongoing reflection on practice in order to enhance the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding**

Indicators

- In supervision, the social worker reflects on the issues arising in their practice, particularly as they relate to the values and principles of social work.
- The social worker is able to relate their reflection on practice to their developing skills and knowledge.
- The social worker is able to reflect on the broader context in which their practice is undertaken.
- The social worker's reflection on practice leads to the development of practice which gradually becomes more and more consistent with the values and principles of social work.

Development of Ethical Practice

Standard 6.4 **The social worker views their own development as an ethical practitioner as essential.**

Indicators

- The social worker reflects on the ethical dilemmas arising in their practice.
- This reflection on practice contributes to the development of their capacity to make ethical decisions.
- The social worker draws on appropriate resources when faced with an ethical dilemma. These resources include supervision, the AASW Code of Ethics and, if necessary, a consultation with their local AASW Branch Ethics Committee.
- As the social worker gains experience, they become more able to make ethical decisions.

Relationship between research and learning

Standard 6.5 **The social worker conducts or participates in research that informs their practice and contributes to the understanding of issues facing individuals and communities.**

Indicators

- The social worker keeps abreast of developments in research to ensure that practice standards continue to develop alongside theoretical knowledge and understanding.
- The social worker is involved in a constant reflection on practice which will lead to the development of best practice in their chosen field of practice.
- The social worker incorporates a research component into their work wherever possible and makes accurate data available, as appropriate, to the research process.
- The social worker incorporates the results of social research undertaken in their community in a way which ensures that the social work service they deliver is as relevant and appropriate as possible.

Development of skills and knowledge related to the demands of a changing society

Standard 6.6 **The social worker incorporates research, knowledge and understanding of the changing needs of their community into their social work practice.**

Indicators

- The social worker is aware of the changes taking part in the community and the ways in which those changes may have an impact on the needs of individuals and groups within the community itself.
- The social worker is aware of the social, economic and political factors affecting the community.
- The social worker contributes to the understanding of the issues facing individuals and groups within the community.
- The social worker contributes to the development of social policy which aims to redress inequalities and other injustices, in line with the values and principles in the AASW Code of Ethics.

Student Education

Standard 6.7 **At the appropriate time, the experienced social worker provides field education learning experiences for social work students.**

Indicators

- the social worker identifies appropriate opportunities for student field education in the context of practice.
- the social worker negotiates field education opportunities with the relevant Schools of Social Work.
- the social worker provides student supervision in a manner consistent with the principles of the AASW Code of Ethics.

Table One

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (LTD)

FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSION EDUCATION, ENTRY, PRACTICE STANDARDS, CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION

EDUCATION AND ENTRY	PRACTICE ETHICS AND STANDARDS	CPE AND ACCREDITATION
<p>Knowledge and skill requirements (competencies)</p> <p>Set out in AASW document “Policy and Procedures For Establishing Eligibility For Membership of AASW” which covers the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimum requirements for membership of applicants educated in Australia; • process for review of existing and new Australian social work courses; • minimum requirements for eligibility of applicants educated overseas; and the • process for establishing overseas social work qualifications. <p>Requirements for registration as a social worker (if and when achieved).</p>	<p>Values, principles, ethical behaviour and practice standards</p> <p>The AASW “Code of Ethics” sets out the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • values; • principles; and • ethical behaviour requirements. <p>The draft AASW “Outcome Practice Standards for Social Workers” set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an objective for each core area of social work practice; • standards of practice relating to each objective; and • indicators for the achievement of the minimum required standard for each practice standard. <p>Code of Ethics and Outcome Practice Standards to be used for induction, supervision and planning of ongoing education by practitioners and supervisors.</p>	<p>Ongoing education and accreditation</p> <p>The AASW “Continuing Professional Education Policy”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sets out the continuing professional education requirements for accreditation purposes; • requires completion of a log book; and • includes provision for random audits. <p>Professional development programs and activities at national and State Branch level, including National and State Conferences and formal professional education workshops, seminars, forums and similar activities provided by the Branches or agencies and other organizations.</p>
	<p>Assessment of practice would be based on the Code of Ethics and the Outcome Practice Standards.</p>	
	<p>Consideration of complaints and application of sanctions would be based on the Code of Ethics and the Outcome Practice Standards.</p> <p>Guidelines may, in the future, be prepared on eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achieving the values, principles and ethical behaviour set out in the Code of Ethics; and • applying the outcome practice standards in particular work settings. 	
Code of Ethics.	Code of Ethics.	Code of Ethics.
Core areas of social work practice.	Core areas of social work practice.	Core areas of social work practice.
Consistent with International provisions.	Consistent with International provisions.	Consistent with International provisions.

Acknowledgements

Work on the development of practice standards for Social Work began with the establishment of a working party of interested members under the convenorship of Dr Barbara Meddin in June 1998. Dr Meddin resigned as convenor in January 1999 and, in June 1999, a smaller Practice Standards Working Party was appointed. Members of the Working Party have been as follows:

- Convenor: Dr Carmel Laragy
- Members: Marie Arends (until December 1999)
Dr Robert Bland (from June 2000)
Roslyn Giles (also Acting/Convenor (from December 2001 to October 2002)
Marian McCann (from June 2000 to August 2002)
Hazel Schollar (until December 1999)
Virginia Scott
Bernice Smith (from June 2000)
- National Vice President: Kate Baker (to November 2001)
Dr Pauline Meemeduma (from November 2001)
- National Office support: Pamela Gallimore
Lynne Materne
Sarah Hordern (from January 2000 to October 2002)
Melanie Williams (from November 2002)

The developmental process included extensive consultations. The *Direct Practice* and *Service Management Practice Standards* were distributed to AASW members for comment and focus groups were held with clients and employers. AASW members were consulted a second time regarding the full set of standards before they were finalised.

The Practice Standards Working Party consulted a range of national and international profession material in addition to the following Australian documents:

- Australian Association of Social Workers (1999) *Code of Ethics* and (2000) *By-laws on Ethics*, ACT, AASW.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (1994) *Australian Social Work Competency Standards for Entry Level Social Workers*, ACT, AASW.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (1993) *National Practice Standards of the Australian Association of Social Workers: Supervision*, ACT, AASW.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (1998) *Policy and Procedures for Establishing Eligibility for Membership of AASW*, ACT, AASW.
- Australian Association of Social Workers New South Wales Branch (1999) *Social Work Principles in Health*, NSW, AASW.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (1999) *The Development of Competency Standards for Mental Health Social Workers: Final Report*, ACT, AASW.

